

Procedures and Activities for the Establishment and Maintenance of a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

This section describes the strategies, procedures, and activities that the Division Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired (SBVI) has implemented to ensure trained staff are delivering quality services to applicants and consumers with whom division personnel work. The Assistant Director of SBVI is the designated training officer for the Division; this position works with the DRS training officer and other SBVI and DRS staff to coordinate activities related to the comprehensive system of personnel development.

Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff

Currently, SBVI employs six vocational rehabilitation counselors who serve consumers statewide. It is projected that the average number of active consumers per caseload will remain constant at approximately 50 for the next five years with current staffing patterns. Caseloads, territories, and customer service will be reviewed periodically to determine the best utilization of existing staff and to determine future ratios to best meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation consumers in SBVI.

The Rehabilitation Act as amended and the Vocational Rehabilitation regulations refer to "Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors". The Division has defined this position as follows:

Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor:

All Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, District Supervisors and State Office Personnel who

- a. meet the standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor;
- b. meet the standards for Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor but are not CRC certified; or
- c. meet the standards for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; have been employed by the Division for a minimum of six months; and have an approved plan to become CRC certified.

Counselors who meet the requirements to become certified through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification are considered qualified counselors. However, to be eligible for a promotion to senior counselor, it is required that counselors have actual CRC certification. All SBVI counselors are currently qualified counselors. Two counselors are in the process of obtaining a Masters Degree.

SBVI anticipates the need to recruit 2 counselors in the next five-year period. The average personnel turnover is 25% for a five-year period. There are no post secondary institutions that offer master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling in the state. Recruitment of qualified staff is accomplished through promoting job announcements at universities in Region VIII with Masters level programs. The University of Northern Colorado, Montana State University and Utah State University are sources for recruitment of graduates with master's level degrees in vocational rehabilitation counseling. In addition, South Dakota has two universities with accredited programs offering masters degrees in counseling. Graduates of these programs are recruited for vocational rehabilitation counselor openings. Graduates are hired and trained to

prepare for the CRCC to meet the highest qualifications in the state for rehabilitation counselors.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors who do not possess a master's degree and CRC certification are required to have a plan with time lines for pursuit of a master's degree and CRC certification. Retention is accomplished through the opportunity for all entry-level vocational rehabilitation counselors to participate in masters level vocational rehabilitation programs, and, once meeting the requirements for "Senior Counselor", receive promotion to this level.

Leadership and management training and assignments with senior level management teams assist counselors to prepare for supervisory and administrative positions. Senior rehabilitation counselors are encouraged to apply for management and administrative positions when there are vacancies. Promotional opportunities are available through opening supervisory and management positions to employees of the designated state unit who are qualified for the positions.

To address the priority of recruiting individuals with disabilities, the South Dakota Bureau of Personnel has in rule that any applicant who meets minimum requirements for employment who has been certified significantly disabled by a rehabilitation counselor will be interviewed for the position. This ensures that individuals who have disabilities have the opportunity to interview and compete for openings in the designated state unit. Efforts to recruit individuals from minority backgrounds include announcing positions through the State Department of Labor and the state's Native American Vocational Rehabilitation programs. Job announcements are available to individuals residing on Tribal lands and the State's Reservations.

It is the policy of the Department to provide equal opportunity employment to all employees and applicants for employment. No person working at the Department's facilities is to be discriminated against in employment because of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, or disability.

Personnel Standards

Working in conjunction with the Bureau of Personnel, the Division has established minimum standards for rehabilitation counselors and senior rehabilitation counselors. These standards are reviewed periodically in light of changing personnel needs, labor market supply and training resources. The Division relies on state standards for secretarial and program administrator positions. These are generic job classifications within the state Bureau of Personnel system. The Division does establish specific work experience requirements in order for individuals to enter these positions.

Newly hired rehabilitation counselors are required to have a degree that will lead towards CRC certification or, if they possess only a bachelor degree, must agree to pursue a master's degree as a condition of employment. The Division will support costs associated with pursuit of master's degrees. Funds for supporting employees pursuing a master's level degree consist of RSA stipends, inservice training money and program 110 funds. Senior rehabilitation counselors are certified through the Certified

Rehabilitation Counselor process. The priority in filling counselor vacancies is a master's and CRC certification. Eligibility for CRC certification (already possess a master's degree but no certification) is the next preferred option. Due to the lack of master's programs for rehabilitation counselors in the state and lower starting salaries compared to surrounding states, it is necessary to hire individuals with bachelor's degrees for entry-level positions and require they become qualified vocational rehabilitation counselors within eight years.

Since South Dakota is a small state, there are several "one of a kind" staff positions. Each year in the personnel performance evaluation process, we identify the professional development needs of these staff. Each employee's immediate supervisor monitors individualized staff development plans. National certification standards are used for the Orientation and Mobility Specialist. The Deaf/Blind Specialist receives training specific to serving individuals with dual sensory loss and the Diabetic Education Specialist receives training specific to alternative methods for diabetic management for individuals who are diabetic and have vision loss. The Assistive Technology Specialist attends regional and national training to keep up to date on the latest advances in technology. The SBVI Low Vision Specialist is certified in Low Vision Rehabilitation.

Data System

The current system to collect and analyze data related to qualified personnel needs and personnel development consists of two components. The South Dakota Bureau of Personnel (BOP) maintains a database of all training activities attended by Division staff including BOP training, seminars, workshops, conferences, and undergraduate and graduate level courses supported by the Division. Individual offices maintain files on educational backgrounds, training activities and goals and plans of employee's to meet the agency requirements for qualified rehabilitation professionals and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). Supervisors are required to address training needs as a part of the annual employee evaluation. Individual training needs are reported to the training officer to be considered in the analysis of results from the annual training needs assessment. This analysis assists with prioritizing future training priorities.

The Division has implemented a web-based management information system. A CSPD database is a component of this system. Input of information is required of individual employees and/or supervisors with access to all information by the Training Officer and other management staff. This system is efficient for addressing individual training needs as well as for projecting for future personnel and training priorities. Staff progress toward meeting CSPD requirements is also tracked by the system.

Staff Development

The state's inservice plan and annual updates outline the strategies that the Division has developed to meet the professional or paraprofessional training needs of staff. The primary strategy of this plan is to assist rehabilitation counselors to obtain the necessary academic training and professional experience to qualify for national CRC certification. Another important strategy is coordination of resources to access the most comprehensive training opportunities. Resources include inservice training, RCEP

sponsored training, and cooperation for training with other organizations (i.e. Department of Labor, Department of Education, and professional organizations such as SD Rehabilitation Action). Cooperation with regional master's programs such as the current distance learning initiative of Montana State at Billings allows South Dakota counselors to participate in master's level vocational rehabilitation courses with tuition and fees covered by an RSA scholarship through Montana State. The last element of this plan is the development of a career ladder that will reward staff for professional development.

In prior years, the Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired has approached personnel development through a number of avenues. Each employee's current level of education and training, as well as short term and long term training needs are tracked by supervisors who evaluate methods for addressing these needs at least annually through the Performance Planning and Review System (PPAR). Individual training needs assessments are conducted to evaluate current levels of education, understanding of fundamentals of vocational rehabilitation, disability-related issues, professional development and related topics. Self evaluation, supervisor input and recommendation sections on the PPAR assist in assessing needs for training which may be pursued through a number of approaches. The results of the assessments are recorded for individuals, groups of related positions (i.e. rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, managers, clerical, etc.) and for the agency as a whole.

The PPAR system allows for ongoing feedback between employees and supervisors by incorporating a self-audit while addressing professionalism, work quality and areas for development as well as areas of strength. Training needs are addressed utilizing a form that not only identifies needed training, but also includes fields for the date the training is scheduled and the date it is attended. BOP workshops are identified under the following headings: supervisory, job enrichment, and technology with "other training" and "job-specific skills" also included in the document used to track need and attendance. The training officer works to identify resources for obtaining training in areas related to vocational rehabilitation (including the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, Workforce Investment Act and RSA regulations), including serving individuals with the most significant disabilities and those of minority backgrounds. Consumers responding to satisfaction surveys and input from the State Rehabilitation Council are also methods utilized to identify training needs.

Cooperation with other entities in state government such as the Department of Labor, Department of Health and the Department of Education, ensures that training opportunities are available which address topics relevant to the field of rehabilitation. Staff have access to intensive training which applies to serving individuals with disabilities, at little or no cost. These conferences and/or seminars are also an opportunity to collaborate with other entities who deliver services to individuals with disabilities. Department of Labor employees are asked to provide training on labor market trends, economic development opportunities and other information to assist in training staff to utilize all existing resources when assisting consumers with job development and job placement activities.

Paraprofessional staff is offered ongoing training in word processing and other software applications as well as office-related courses such as effective writing and organization skills through the Bureau of Personnel. Courses specific to the vocational rehabilitation management information system and requirements specific to vocational rehabilitation are offered through inservice training sessions usually taught by agency specialty staff.

Leadership development and capacity building are addressed through distance learning courses as well as agency sponsored training sessions. Assistive technology training is available through DakotaLink, the state's assistive technology systems change project, the SBVI Assistive Technology Specialist or the State Bureau of Information and Technology (for employees with disabilities who utilize assistive technology on the job). Annual training conferences address current research through contracting with national Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTC's) to address specific topics identified in the annual training needs assessment. Topics related to ethics, neuro functions, and working with ex-offenders were addressed in 2005.

Cooperative agreements are in place with the state's four Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Projects and the Native American Independent Living Project to provide training to staff on cultural diversity. Ongoing training is provided to address informed choice as it relates to agency policies and practices. The State Rehabilitation Council has recommended strategies that have been implemented for addressing informed choice in the rehabilitation process.

Communication with Diverse Populations

Interpreters are available for all training sessions as well as to consumers who are deaf/blind. Braille, materials on disk and enlarged print are provided to all staff or consumers who request alternative formats. The Division has developed fee schedules and vendors to address the need for interpreters of foreign languages and Native American language.

Coordination of the CSPD and Inservice Training

Training on IDEA and transition services for students with disabilities is coordinated with the State Division of Special Education and the Transition Services Liaison Project. Currently the eighth annual Youth Leadership Forum is being planned through collaboration of the State Divisions of Special Education, Rehabilitation Services, Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Transition Services Liaison Project. Training needs of the state's Native American Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, Centers for Independent Living, the Client Assistance Program and community rehabilitation programs are also gathered and reported to the Region VIII RCEP and considered in planning training activities within the division.

As previously stated, training needs are addressed through a variety of resources. Inservice training is the main resource with the Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs in Region VIII (the General and CRP RCEP's) addressing regional and national priorities. Other resources accessed by staff to meet their individual training needs include: workshops, conferences and seminars hosted by other government organizations such as Special Education, Department of Labor and the Bureau of

Personnel. Professional organizations (SD Rehab Action, APSE, NRA, AER and etc.) regularly work with the training officer to prioritize topics relevant to employment of people with disabilities and base workshops or conference sessions on the training needs assessment conducted by the Division. Consumer organizations (SD Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, SD Association of the Blind, National Federation of the Blind of SD, and the SD Association of the Deaf) are examples of sponsors of training. Distance learning activities in which SBVI employees participate provide a cost-effective method for participation in a number of topics pertinent to RSA priorities. Independent study and mentoring by supervisors and senior rehabilitation counselors are other means for meeting individual staff development needs.

State Rehabilitation Council

Results from the statewide training need assessments are shared with the Board for their input and advice. Board members are invited to agency training sessions and conferences and offer advice on topics and presenters. The State Rehabilitation Council is included in the development of the state plan and related policies and procedures and board members have the opportunity to review and provide input into the draft pre print and attachments prior to submission to RSA. In addition, Board members participate in and assist with facilitation at annual public meetings.

State Unified Plan

The Unified State Plan section titled "Professional Development and Systems Improvement" requires descriptions of how the state develops personnel to achieve the performance indicators for the programs in the plan. State plan attachment 4.11(b) of the SBVI plan describes the policies, procedures, and activities that vocational rehabilitation maintains to ensure an adequate supply of qualified rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals as partner agencies in the implementation of workforce investment activities in South Dakota. Qualified professional staff are assigned responsibility to the local one-stop councils to train partner agencies in the roles and parameters of public vocational rehabilitation in the one-stop system. All personnel matters concerning public vocational rehabilitation are under the strict authority of the designated state unit to include hiring, supervision, training, and development. The Division Director provides the state plan updates to the Workforce Development Council for review and attends a Workforce Development meeting to seek support for submission of annual state plan updates.